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British Future Reserves 2020: can history help determine success?

Historian Peter Dennis wrote in the introduction to *The Territorial Army 1907-1940*, that the organisation ‘has had a chequered history. Apart from a short period immediately after its establishment, it has suffered from periodic indifference and neglect, and occasional hostility, both at the hands of the government and from the public.’¹ Now once again the spotlight is well and truly back on the organisation in its supposedly new incarnation as the Army Reserve. The government’s Army Reserves 2020, and Future Reserves 2020 scheme will by 2018 have seen the sacking of 20,000 multi-tour veteran regular British soldiers to be replaced by 30,000 part-time Army Reserve (AR) soldiers (the new name for the Territorial Army (TA)); which together has contributed to making British combat power 20-30 per cent less effective.² With more cuts to come from a British Government that refuses to say whether it will meet NATO’s 2 per cent of GDP commitment on defence spending Britain may become even less effective as time progresses.

This paper therefore looks into whether history can determine if the AR will be able to step-up and fill the capability gaps left by the retrenchment of regular soldiers, and become a better trained and more deployable force than the old Territorials. Plans and strategic intent on how to use the new smaller more reliant on reservist forces army, Royal Navy and Royal Airforce have appeared in government and Ministry of Defence publications. The new order of battle (ORBAT) is a four tier construct named the ‘Multi-Brigade ORBAT’ which comprises of a deployed force, a high readiness reserve force, a lower readiness reserve force and an extended readiness force. Within all of these tiers the AR feature as a component. However, are the AR capable of fulfilling its stated roles? This paper argues that this is highly unlikely as the first AR troops that would be called-up if needed would be the High Readiness Reserve part-

¹ Peter Dennis, *The Territorial Army 1907-1940* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society, 1987), p. 1.

² International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance: The Annual Assessment of Global Military Capabilities and Defence Economics* (London: IISS, 2015), p. 68.

timers, there are only around 100 of these volunteers. Also would it be ethical to send these volunteers anyway? The AR High Readiness Reserve, as well as their 27 days commitment, have only a few extra weekends training in preparation for this role, the White Paper on Future Reserves 2020 states that these volunteers would not receive Pre deployment training before being deployed. Are these troops going to be effective?

To be able to carry out this research the training, pre-deployment training and deployment of the Army Reserves antecedents – the Territorials of the Territorial Force and Territorial Army, who provided the structure and framework of how the AR operate, is used from 1908 through to 2012. The paper asked whether the AR can ever be trained to a higher standard than that achieved by their antecedents. If so how would this be possible when the organisations participants generally have jobs and families that both demand time? A model constructed for the research – The Territorial Trinity of Commitments, a three sided triangle comprising of military training, employment issues and family issues reveals how much training a part-time soldier can achieve against the tensions inherent against the competing demands of having a job and having a family.

The research also looks at the kit and equipment issues that plagued the old Territorials who were always seen as a second class organisation that only took funds away from the regular army; consequently they always received second best and second hand equipment, mostly obsolete to train with. This beggared existence and the limits to training poor equipment forced had an unintended consequence at the start of the Great War when Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War bypassed the Territorial Force to set-up a completely new army the ‘Pals Battalions’, a source of embarrassment and anger among the Territorials of that generation.

Research has also revealed that due to the historical continuities from the Territorials through to the AR (they use the same framework of organisation for training and deploying as their antecedents), will ensure that one of the only new things about the AR is their re-branding. History shows that the same type of employers support the AR (big business and the Civil Service) as they supported the Territorials of the past. Moreover, the same types of businesses still do not support the organisation, such as Small and Medium Enterprises, the self-employed and organisations such as the Trades Unions etcetera. The employer of the reservist also still has a massive say how much their employee could/can participate in

Territorial/Reservist training. Furthermore, the volunteer's family has a very strong influence upon a volunteer joining the part-timers, how much training they complete and how long the volunteer will serve. The AR's still only have to commit to 27 days training (as with the Territorials). If they are mobilised they still have to undertake theatre specific Pre-deployment training (as did the Territorials). One major change though is that the cost of a reservist soldier is spiralling upwards sometimes costing thousands of pounds more to deploy than a regular soldier.

This paper will argue that FR2020 will only be as successful as the Territorials before them, and are essentially prisoners of history.